

## **Edwards Speech at Deployment Ceremony for the 124th Cavalry Regiment of the Texas Army National Guard**

It is a humbling privilege for me to be here with all of you today. You know, there are a lot of people in this audience who might be called VIPs, but make no mistake--today, we know who the real VIPs are, we know who the real heroes are—they are the citizen soldiers and families of the Texas National Guard. The rest of us come here to salute you, to thank you, to honor you.

As the father of two young sons, it is difficult for me to fully express in words the deep gratitude I feel for those whose service will make the world a better, safer place for my children and all children. I hope you know the words we express today are but a small down payment on our lifelong debt of gratitude to you, our soldiers, and your families.

From my office desk in Washington, I look out every day at the dome of our nation's capitol. It has been called the Citadel of our democracy. It is, perhaps, the greatest symbol of democracy in the world. People from all across the world are moved by the sight of our nation's capitol and the freedom and democracy for which it stands. I continue to be inspired every day by the sight of that majestic capitol, whose cornerstone was laid by George Washington in 1793. Yet, when I see it, I cannot help but remember that while the Capitol dome stands as a magnificent symbol of our democracy, the true defenders of that democracy are those who serve in uniform.

At the heart of our nation's defense stands the citizen soldier. It is a legacy deeply rooted in the American story. From Lexington and Concord to Gettysburg, from the Argonne forest to the beaches of Normandy, from the frozen mountains of Korea to the steaming jungles of Viet Nam, from the rugged terrain of Afghanistan to the streets of Baghdad, America's citizen soldier has always answered our nation's call to duty. That legacy of service has made our nation and the world a better place.

Today, these citizen soldiers begin writing the next chapter in the Texas National Guard's proud story of service to state and country. Theirs will be a story of protecting our nation from terrorists who would do us harm. In the Texas tradition, I know their story will make us all proud. For all of us here, I would have to believe this is a moment of mixed emotions—a time of pride and humility, a time of togetherness and separation, a time of joy and tears. As a fellow Texan I feel pride that Task Force Saber will serve our nation with distinction.

As a fellow American, I feel blessed that we live in a nation where citizen soldiers such as you are willing to answer the call to duty in time of war and peace, at home and abroad. Yours is such a noble calling—to protect our nation, our freedoms and our families.

As a fellow parent, I feel inexpressible gratitude for the sacrifice you are making—to be away

from your own families in service to the American family. One cannot put a price tag on time away from family. There are no makeup days for missed births, first steps, birthdays and graduations. There is no compensation that can replace your missing the special joys of everyday moments with your children and loved ones. However, we hope you know that our thoughts, our prayers and our deep respect will be with you every day of your service in Iraq.

To the loved ones of those leaving today—parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, you are truly the unsung heroes of America's national security. You might not be wearing our nation's uniform, but you are surely serving our nation through your personal sacrifice of separation from your loved ones. We salute you for your service to country.

To the children of the Texas National Guard, I know this is a difficult day for you. As a father of two young boys, I want to tell you this—you should be immensely proud of your parents. When you miss them the most, remember that they are serving our nation because of their love for you and for the hope of making our world a safer place for you and your generation. Their willingness to make sacrifices for you, even when it means time away from you, whom they love so much, shows how special you are to your parents. I would consider my life a success if some day my two sons had the right to be half as proud of me as you have a right to be proud of your parents.

To the soldiers of the 1st Squadron of the 124th Cavalry Regiment and the Delta Company of the 949th Brigade Support Battalion, you are professionals and great Texans and true American patriots. God bless you, each of you. The Good Book says "blessed are the peacemakers", and, surely, bringing peace to a dangerous world is your ultimate mission. It is the most noble of missions in life. I know you don't consider yourselves heroes, but America does.

We don't say good-bye today, because we look forward to your returning to the hugs of your families and to a warm Texas homecoming. Until then, the prayers of millions of Texans will be with you.

God speed, soldiers, and may the Good Lord keep you safely in His loving arms.